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The Universal Short Title Catalogue Database

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The Edinburgh Legal History Blog

The Universal Short Title Catalogue Database

Posted on [November 8, 2014](#) by [Karen Baston](#)

Professor Andrew Pettegree directs the AHRC-funded project based at St Andrews that makes the Universal Short Title Catalogue (USTC) happen. Researchers on the project have been traveling across Europe to examine books and record them since the 1990s. Originally a project focusing on French printed books, the USTC also came to encompass the Iberian Peninsula and the Low Countries. This book-in-hand cataloguing is combined in the USTC with the national bibliographical projects of the UK, Germany, and Italy. The result is absolutely stunning.

The USTC Database aims to capture all books printed in Europe from the dawn of printing to the end of the sixteenth century. There are plans to extend into the seventeenth century, too.

[Explore the USTC](#)

This is good news for legal historians. The USTC will be extremely useful in tracking the publication of law books across boundaries, the development of the *ius commune* and of humanism, and the development of national legal systems. The collective nature of the USTC makes it much easier to see patterns and trends in context than is possible using national catalogues or even WorldCat.

The USTC Database is also a pleasure to use. the pages are laid out logically and links to related resources are clear. Books in other databases are linked to directly and this makes the USTC the first port of call for preliminary searching.

Users can search for books by almost any way imaginable. Author, title, keyword, translator, editor, short title, printer, place of publication, and year are all options. You can also search by language, format, classification ('Jurisprudence' brings up 22,636 choices), and digital copy availability. A search for 'Justinianus I' returns 1035 entries ranging in date from 1468 to 1600 and 152 of these are accessible digitally.*

Each entry has an appropriate image for the book being described. For example, at the entry for USTC 509496: Buchanan, George, *Rerum Scoticarum historia auctore Georgio Buchanano Scoto* (Edinburgh, apud Alexander Arbutnot, 1582), we find a portrait of Buchanan. Details like this occur throughout the pages – this is obviously a project where attention to detail is paramount.

The only downside, if it can be called that, is that the USTC Database means work for your blogger. When I transcribed the library of Charles Areskine of Alva as part of my PhD submitted in December 2011, I included modern catalogue records for the books listed there along with references to their identification codes in national bibliographical databases. Now that the USTC is here, [this catalogue](#) must be regarded as incomplete until the USTC codes can be added to it.

*Figures at date of post.

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